

Does Jiva Sakti Exist? A Comparative Cultural and Scientific Analysis.

Dr Nemaï C Karmakar

Department of Electrical and Computer Systems Engineering
Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Background and Aims: Different schools of Vedic philosophies hold contradicting views of the existence of Para Brahman's phenomenal world and His various potencies. Sankaracharaya's Advaita philosophy advocates a formless, attributeless, indeterminate and acosmic absolute. Vaishnav philosophy preaches Bhakti at the entirety of the supreme personality of the Godhead and serving Him by all means. The great Vaishnav teacher, Sri Chaitanya holds the firm conviction of personalised God; Supersoul is His effulgence as He is the sun disc and His rays are Brahmajyoti. His other two potencies are: (i) His external energy or Maya-sakti which manifests as the material world. And (ii) the marginal energy or Jiva-sakti that constitutes living entities. Both schools of thought stand firm in their convictions of a non-dual, one God. However, non-dualism negates the personalised God, and Vaishnav philosophy accepts personalised God and His phenomenal world and Jiva-sakti – His marginal energy - as real.

This article uses the theory of optics as an explanatory means for bridging the gap between the external and internal potencies of Brahman and the deeper meaning of His marginal energy, which is manifested in living beings as Jiva-sakti. Based on the above theory, the living entity (Jiva-sakti) is a mere interface or illusory physical boundary line between His two potencies – the internal or spiritual potency and the external or material potency. In that aspect, Jiva-Sakti has no real or physical existence and is a mere distorted reflection of Brahmajyoti on the material world. The science of oblique incidence, reflection, transmission, and total internal reflection of optics helps us understand the eternal truth that Jiva-sakti is part and parcel of Brahman. Finally, Bhakti Yoga, which is the most recommended path of liberation in the iron age of Kali Yuga, is examined in the light of the above logic and metaphor.

Methodology: The main Vedic scriptures are systematically analysed and presented to understand the potencies of Brahman. A comparative analysis is made of non-dualism and dualism with personalised God. The oblique incidence, reflection and transmission theory of optics is used as the instrument to build an analogy of the three energies of Brahman. The transmigration from one potency to another, based on the inclination of Jiva's natural tendencies, is also examined. Finally, Bhakti Yoga as the means of liberation and eternal attachment to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is described based on Vedic literature.

Findings and Conclusions: Pieces of evidence from the various Vedic scriptures and Vaishnav philosophy provide an understanding that God has eternal and unlimited potency. God's potency is manifested in his two main modes of energy: spiritual and material. The analogies drawn from the science of optics thematically suggest that objects residing inside water are perceived as illusory as the exact location and forms are distorted due to the parallax of the light reflected and projected to the viewer. In this regard, the living being as the marginal energy of God is distortedly projected on the plane of the material world. The true identity of the living being is not the perishable gross body and

Keywords

Para Brahman,
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Supreme
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Godhead,
His three potencies,
cit shakti, maya
shakti, jiva shakti,
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reflection, Prema-
bhakti, Bhakti-yoga

subtle mind, intellect, and ego, but the eternal spirit-soul Himself. In that aspect, in the light of scientific analogy, both Sankaracharya's nondualism and Vaishnava philosophy hold the same truth of oneness in God.

Corresponding author: Dr. Nemai C Karmakar

Email address for the corresponding author: nemai.karmakar@gmail.com

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Introduction

Sanatana Dharma accepts different forms of God and provides followers with full freedom to worship God in any form of choice of individual worshippers. Vedic scriptures describe the attributes of the Supreme Soul or Supreme Personality of Godhead as formless, attributeless, indeterminate and acosmic absolutes, as well as with forms and attributes (Tapasyananda, 2016). The essence of these Vedic scriptures is that the absolute truth is one, but due to the infinite potencies of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, only wise people *Gyanis* appreciate His various manifestations (Bhagavat Gita -BG). *Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti* (the Rigveda 1:164:46). As Sri Sri Ramkrishna Paramhanshadev says: *Joto Mot Toto Poth* (as many beliefs, that many ways; but the goal is one). He explains the dual nature of the supreme personality of Godhead with the example of colorless and odorless water becoming solidified as visible white snow due to cold winds (*heem*) (Gupta 2004). Bhakti (devotion) is applied as the means; devotional service to Godhead witnesses a personalised Godhead (Gupta, 2004).

Based on the vastness of the Vedic literature and philosophical thoughts, there are three existing main schools of belief systems: *Kevaladvaita* (absolute non-dualism) of Sankaracharya, *Vishishtadvaita* (non-duality with distinctions) of Sri Ramanujacharya and *Dvaita* (dualism) Madhwacharya (Wikipedia, Hindu Philosophy, 2023, Bharati, 2023) as shown in Figure 1. The prominent branches of Sanatana philosophy are *Sankhya Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaishesika*, *Mimansa*, and *Vedanta* – these are theistic and Vedic. While the other three are atheistic: Charvaka, Jain and Bouddha dharma.

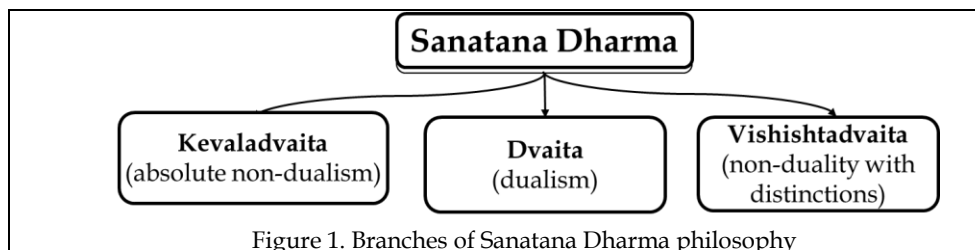


Figure 1. Branches of Sanatana Dharma philosophy

In Sankaracharya's absolute non-dualism, only the attributeless and formless supreme soul is considered to be the absolute reality and only truth, while the extraneous manifestations of the material energy of the absolute are illusory. As Sri Krishna says, in BG, "Temporary entities have no existence while *Sat* or permanent entities have no destruction" (BG 2.16). While Sankaracharya's *Kevaladvaita* is considered to be the first systematic presentation of Vedantic teachings making them highly popular, the great Vaishnav teachers present the teachings from a completely different viewpoint, accepting both dualism and realism (Tapasyananda, 2016). The resulting simplicity in explanation and definitiveness of the supreme personality of Godhead with attributes and forms, along with an ideal of *sat-cit-ananda bigraha* represents a core understanding of real love, affection, and bliss of the Supersoul. Here God is not

perceived as an old judge with thick lenses of reading glasses and accounts of the sinful activities of the *Jivas* in their past lives on earth. Instead, He is perceived as the reservoir of love and affection for the devotees. (Gyaneswarananda, 2010, Saradananda, 1995). The philosophy considers the infinite potencies of the supreme personality of Godhead with infinite majesties of *Aisvarya* (power), *Dharma* (goodness), *Yasa* (glory), *Sri* (splendour), *Gyana* (knowledge) and *Vairagya* (detachment). If we observe those six-fold qualities in any person in abundance we call Him Bhagavan (Gitananda, 2014).

Literature Review

Tapasyananda (2016) in his monologue titled: *Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu: His Life, Religion and Philosophy* analyses the important differences between the two philosophies as follows, in brief:

Table 1: Comparative analysis of non-dualism and Visnava Bhakti philosophy

Attributes	Sankaracharya's non-dualism	Vaishnav bhakti philosophy
Attributes of God	Formless, attributeless (nirguna), indefinite, absolute	Supreme Personality of Godhead in the spiritual planets
Concepts of God	Personalised Gods are conceived as mediatory attributes to help discriminate Jiva-sakti from supreme absolute	God as ultimate reality; <i>Sat-Cit-Ananda</i>
Jiva-sakti	<i>Jivas</i> are identical to Brahman	<i>Jivas</i> are different/distinguishable, not identical, yet potentially possess the same as the quality of Godhead. Two thoughts of Vaishnavism: (i) Jiva is different from Godhead, and (ii) Jiva will merge with Godhead after liberation
<i>Maya-sakti</i>	Brahman and <i>Maya-sakti</i> are indifferent	<i>Maya-sakti</i> and <i>Jiva-sakti</i> are real
<i>Cit-sakti</i>	Different from gross, body, mind, intellect etc.	
<i>Jiva's</i> position	<i>Jiva's</i> bondage and liberation are unreal	Liberation of <i>Jivas</i> from bondage is the prime goal of life
Philosophy	Path of Knowledge	Path of bhakti; combination of karma, gyana, and bhakti yogas
Path of salvation	Salvation through tough austerity for knowledge to be one with the formless absolute	Does not want salvation, but wants only to serve God
Based on	Systematic metaphysics with a spiritual orientation	Systematic physiological anecdotes based on creations of the universe and living and non-living entities are considered to be real.

Tapasyananda (2016) concludes this comparative analysis of non-dualism and Vaishnav philosophy by stating that non-dualism is essentially a system of metaphysics with a spiritual orientation. It is based on a systematic philosophical exploration that finds the ultimate truth in all living and non-living entities by delving through the knowledge of their process of creation and the ever-changing characteristics of creations. A Jnana yogi's investigative process consists of elimination and negation through the discriminatory power of mind and knowledge. He does not stop until he finds the ultimate realism. On the other hand, a Vaishnav accepts reality in every aspect of the process - the creation of the universe from absolute reality, His nurturing of His creation as a parent, and finally, achieving emancipation through serving the personalised supreme reality. A Vaishnav is always in association with the person God either it is being in the material planets, or it is being in the spiritual planets/skies (Prabhupada, 1998).

Methodology: Three Saktis of Supreme Personality of Godhead

So far, we have done a brief comparative analysis of non-dualism and Vaishnav philosophy. The entirety of this analysis is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna. Now we are going to discuss His three potencies. The three saktis of Sri Krishna are: (i) *Svarupa-sakti* (innate potency), (ii) *Jiva-sakti* (peripheral or marginal potency) and (iii) *Bahiranga-sakti* or *Maya-sakti* (extraneous potency). Figure 2 illustrates the three saktis and their attributes. With the aid of these three potencies of the supreme personality of Godhead, He sustains His creations. With the expansion of His three Saktis non-dualism is sustained. Unlike Sankacharya's non-dualism, Vaishnavs accept one Supreme Personality of Godhead as the absolute and He is the cause of all causes, full of potency. He is the *Saktimat* (sustainer and reservoir of His potencies). For the *Saktimat* and His *sakti* are not different. For example, fire itself and its intrinsic potencies of burning power (*daha-sakti*) along with its light and heat are non-different from fire. Further extending the metaphor, sparks of fire are minute and temporarily different entities but equal in the quality of fire (Prabhupada, 1988). Accepting these analogies of the physical world is true; He is non-different and different to His other two potencies. As illustrated in Figure 2a, the various *saktis* of the supreme personality of Godhead, starting from His *Bahiranga* or *Maya sakti*, in which we, the living beings, reside, it is His cosmic manifestations as the material universe that are divided into fourteen lokas (spheres) of planetary systems (Wikipedia, Hindu Cosmology, 2023). *Maya-sakti* is insentient gross matter, also called *Prakriti*, while the supreme personality of Godhead is the *Purusa*. *Purusa* existed before His creation hence He is eternal. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna in BG that He knows the details of the births of the oldest sages. Because He is the *adi-purusa*. Sri Krishna also says in Chapter 15: *Purusattam Yoga* of BG that He is the seed-giving father to impregnate *Prakriti* and creates the manifested world. *Prakriti*, the material world being made of gross matter, is subject to continuous changes and is comprised of three gunas: *Sattvas*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Srimadbhagabatam (SB) describes how he has created innumerable universes laying Himself as *Mahavisnu* in the *Karan Jaal* with the imbalance of these three gunas in *Mahattava* and cloud (SB 2.5.22-33).

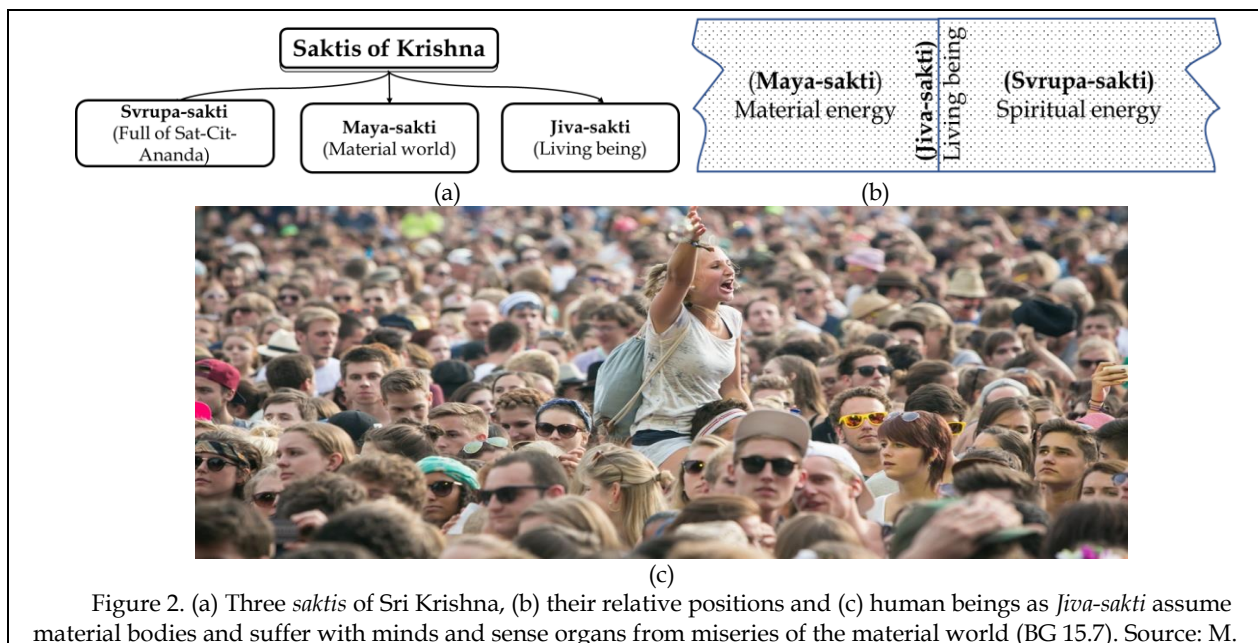


Figure 2. (a) Three *saktis* of Sri Krishna, (b) their relative positions and (c) human beings as *Jiva-sakti* assume material bodies and suffer with minds and sense organs from miseries of the material world (BG 15.7). Source: M.

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Sri Krishna again says that *Samsara* or the material world is like an ever-changing eternal banyan tree of which the root is upwards toward *Para Brahman*, the branches are downwards and absorbed with the three modes of material nature or *gunas* (BG 15.1-4). In essence, the material world reflects the spiritual world as a tree on the bank of a calm body of water reflects an image with roots projected upwards and branches and leaves downwards (Prabhupada, 1983). Krishna says in BG that only wise men can find the way to go upwards to Him, cutting the branches of *Maya* and climbing directly towards the root. The ignorant *Jivas* cannot find the passage to climb upward to *Para Brahman* and thus are compelled to go through the eternal cycles of birth, death, and miseries of old age and disease. Therefore, the material world has His *Sat* (eternal existence) attributes but is devoid of His *Cit* (consciousness) and *Ananda* (bliss) attributes (Tapasyananda, 2016).

His *Svarupa-sakti* is full of *bliss* and *consciousness*. However, the material world is devoid of these two eternal qualities and is thence called extraneous. This is in contrast to that of His *Svarupa-sakti*. Accepting the personalised God, *Vaishnavs* do not accept the world as illusory; but Sankaracharya's non-dualism does. *Vaishnavs* accept the personified *Para Brahman* as the cause of all causes, and the effects of the causes as the phenomenal world through its material nature; which is conceived as real by *Jivas* due to ignorance and forgetfulness of their divine identity. *Jivas*, though they are all *Cit* and *Ananda* individual monads, their closeness to the material world makes them ignorant of their true self-Atman (Tapasyananda, 2016). Figure 2b illustrates the relative position of *Jiva-sakti* which is merely a boundary between the *Svarupa-sakti* and *Maya-sakti*. *Jiva-sakti*, by nature, is self-luminous consciousness and part and parcel of His *Svarupa-sakti*. However, as shown in the photograph in Figure 2c, human beings as *Jiva-sakti* assume material (gross) bodies, are always under the influences of the three modes of material nature (three *gunas*) and suffer with their minds, as well as sense organs in the material world (BG 15.7).

This closeness of the material world and Supreme Personality of Godhead (*Svarupa-Sakti*) for *Jivas* can be perceived as an iron rod (*Jiva*) which gets induced with magnetic qualities and acquires the power to attract other iron objects, as long as it remains in contact with a permanent powerful magnet. Here the magnet can be considered to be the *Svarupa-sakti* or *Maya-Sakti*. The iron rod loses its magnetic quality if it loses its association with either *Svarupa-sakti* or *Maya-sakti*, becoming again like an ordinary iron rod. Since this qualification is not permanent for *Jiva*, inclination towards *Maya-sakti* binds *Jivas* in the natures of the materials: *Sattvas*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. Being associated with material natures, *Jivas*, the centres of consciousness, are entangled with ignorance and sense gratification. Likewise, *Murkhas* (foolish persons) forget their Divine natures of consciousness and bliss, and lose the affinities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This inclination can be either towards Godhead or towards *Maya-sakti*, depending on the nature of *Jivas*. In this connotation, *Jivas* have free wills; Sri Krishna, the supreme personality of Godhead, is so kind to *Jivas* that He mercifully provides them with opportunities for corrections so that they reach divinity after making the effort in each incarnation. Another connotation of the *Jiva-sakti's* relationship with *Maya-sakti* and *Svarupa-sakti* is like the bank of a river. The land is *Maya-sakti* and the water of the river is *Svarupa-sakti*. Being the edge between the river and the land, although *Jivas* are conscious and similar in quality to Brahman's *Svarupa-sakti*, they lose their *Sandihini* character when absorbed by the soil of the adjunct land, the *Maya-sakti*. The transparency and fluidity of the water are lost as it is contaminated with soil. That is why *jiva sakti* is also called *Tathasta-sakti*. In Sanskrit *Tathasta* means *marginal*.

"Next, *Jiva-sakti* is perceived as His power of self-multiplication and has I-ness. It is subtler than the gross material nature of *Maya-sakti*. It is closer to the *Saktimat*, the supreme personality of the Godhead, and has countless centres of consciousness or *Cit-sakti*. *Jiva-sakti* is the expression of His attributes of *Consciousness* or *Cit-sakti*, but lacks existence, being the marginal potencies of Him and makes a fictitious

boundary between the *Svarupa-sakti* and *Maya-sakti*. *Jiva-sakti* being closer to His *Svarupa-sakti*, sometimes it obtains bliss also called *Suddha-Sattva* when it comes in close association with supreme consciousness. Or it lost consciousness and bliss attributes, and it is called *prakrita-sattva* (*material sattva*). In this state, it is absorbed and entangled with material miseries due to its closeness to *Maya-sakti*." (Tapasyananda, 2016)

His *Svarupa-sakti* is full of *Sat* (eternal existence), *Cit* (consciousness) and *Ananda* (bliss). *Svarupa-sakti* is categorised into three aspects: (i) *Sandihini* correspondence with His *Sat* attributes – is the potency by which he sustains His existence as well as His expansions in creations of *Jiva* and *Maya saktis*; (ii) *Samvit* correspondence with His *Cit* attributes – by which He possesses self-knowledge, also He knows others and endows others with knowledge; and finally, (iii) *Hladini* correspondence with His *Ananda* attributes with which He enjoys His innate bliss and makes others enjoy the same. Figure 3a illustrates different *Svarupa-saktis* of the supreme personality of Godhead; 3b shows Sri Radhika's causeless love and service to please Krishna as the *Hladini-sakti* or *Mahabhava*.

With these attributes, He enjoys his innate nature of *Sat-Cit-Ananda Bigraha*. Sri Krishna is a symbol of all-powerful (*Hare*), all-attractive (*Krishna*) and all-pleasing (*Rama*) potencies (Prabhupada, 1988). He is the reservoir of eternal love also called *Rasa*. As shown in Figure 3b, Sri Radhika's love for Sri Krishna is the epitome of the highest pleasing nature of love or *Hladini* (Tapasyananda 2016). Sri Krishna Himself is *Manmatha* who churns and pleases the minds of all living beings. He is also the conqueror of *Kama* or *Madana* (sensual pleasure). This is why he is called *Madanmohana* (Maharaj, 1994). Even *Adi Guru Mouni Siva* was disturbed by *Madana* during His meditation. He ran after him to punish him for the disturbance he created (Gitananda, 2004). While Sri Krishna Himself is *Madanmohana*, He is under the control of Sri Radha's unalloyed highest love – the *Hladini* aspect of His *Svarupa-sakti*. That is why Sri Radhika is the *Madanmohana Mohini-sakti*. With this quality, She has placed Herself as the most beloved eternal escort in the spiritual sky of Sri Krishna. Every Vaishnav devotee has the ideal of Sri Radhika's love. Their goal is to obtain the mercy of Sri Radhika, pleasing her by chanting Sri Krishna's name, remembering Him every moment, listening to His glories, and developing a service attitude (*seva*) in their every action. Finally, for the difference between a mundane and a wise person, Sri Sri *Ramkrishna Paramhamshadev* gives a very nice explanation. He says that a wise person sees the material and spiritual worlds as separated by a thin line. The same water but a thin line is placed. For a mundane person, a big and thick wooden log is placed on the water so that the same water looks fully separated (Gupta, 2004).

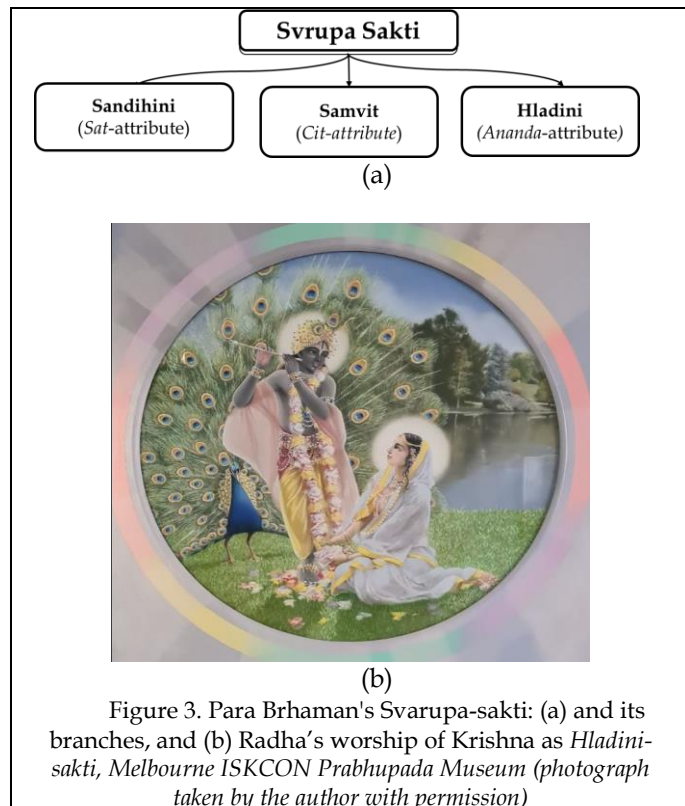


Figure 3. Para Brhman's Svarupa-sakti: (a) and its branches, and (b) Radha's worship of Krishna as *Hladini-sakti*, Melbourne ISKCON Prabhupada Museum (photograph taken by the author with permission)

Metaphors, Experiments and Findings

In this section, a scientific metaphor of the three *saktis* based on the theory of optics is presented. The three *saktis* of the supreme personality of Godhead are perceived well when we accept the *virat-rupa* of Sri Krishna and his process of creation of the Material world and *Jivas*. Such a process, as His eternal potencies, is briefly explained above. The Supreme Personality of Godhead has two aspects to comprehend Him. The first one is his formless, attributeless and acosmic *Svarupa-sakti*. This is explained in the first verse of Canto 1 of SB by Vyasa Deva. The second process of knowing Him is through his extraneous potency also called *Tatsthata Lakhana (marginal attributes)*. Examples of *Tatsthata* attributes are as follows: (i) if a big lush green tree catches our attention from far away, we can expect that there is a big river next to the tree. Because usually, on the bank of a river such lavish green large trees exist. (ii) Secondly, if we see *dhumra* (smoke) from the foothill of a mountain from far away, we infer there must be a bushfire. Because smoke is the inherent attribute of bushfires. In this section, the scientific theory of optics and its oblique incidence, transmission and reflection will be used as the *Tatsthata* attribute of His three potencies: *Svarupa*, *Maya* and *Jiva-saktis*.

Risk Factors and Calculative Guessing in Using Metaphors:

The ray trace model of oblique incidence of optics at the interface of two media is a very simplistic approach to introducing an analogy of the three *saktis* of the *Saktimat*. Therefore, the concepts and precepts presented in the metaphor may be misleading if no connections between the attributes and expansions of the *virat rupa* of the supreme personality of Godhead and its intricacy are simplified. As stated above even the gross materials nature of His is highly conceptual and subtle in nature: then *Jiva-sakti* is even subtler and the *Svarupa-sakti* is the subtlest, but complete in *Sat-Cit-Ananda* attributes. Therefore, to comprehend such an inconceivable hypothesis of the potencies of the supreme personality of Godhead through a simplified ray trace model of oblique incidence may seem illogical. To simplify further, a spider sitting on its web and the structure of the web will be used as the attribute of God's material and marginal potencies (Karmakar, 2023). Finally, the same spider and its anatomy with legs and tentacles are presented to understand the fluidity of the *Jiva-sakti* and its free movements between His *Maya* and *Svarupa-saktis*.

Ray Trace Model of Oblique Incidence: Analogy of Three Saktis

The *Saktimat* and His *sakti* are non-different in quality, but different in attributes. Figure 4 illustrates fish swimming in an aquarium (Karmakar, 2023). Due to the two media of optic paths _ water and air and their interface plane, the parallax creates an angular deviation (also called angular modulation) of the optical ray coming from the fish in the water tank to the observer from above the fish tank. The angular modulation is also called *refraction* or *parallax* of the optics ray. Due to the parallax, the observer cannot see the exact location of the fish, rather an illusory nearness and distorted locations and shapes. Thus, the objects (fish in this case) are perceived by the brain via the eyes of the observer at a distance, but in reality, it is not the case due to parallax. For example, if a passenger sees the odometer from a distance with an angle, s/he would see a higher speed at the odometer needle. Whereas the driver seeing directly, can read the exact speed of the vehicle. Many such examples can be given to exemplify the distorted projection of the Supersoul on the plane of the material world. Here, the passenger is like the *Jiva* and the driver is like *Saktimat*, or a wise person who can see the exact speed. Similarly, the water that holds the fish is like the Supersoul, but the fish are like individual spirit souls submerged in the Supersoul; hence projecting illusory objects to the observer in the material planet. The tank water has a relative mass much larger than air. There is a similar quantity in optics called *refractive index*. The *refractive index* is the degree at which light rays diminish concerning the speed of light in air or vacuum. The *refractive index* of sea water is 9

whereas the refractive index of air is 1. Due to this high refractive index, the reflected signal (light ray) from the fish in the tank is distortedly projected at the water-air interface. And this angular modulation is very large. The light ray bends considerably due to the big difference in the refractive indices of the two media. That is why if a fish goes a little far from the vertical centre line and creates an incident angle quite large, the observer cannot see the fish in the tank at all. This phenomenon is called total *internal reflection*. As stated above, due to the big difference in the refractive indices of water and air, the angular spread is quite large. And the area of visibility reduces with the difference in refractive indices. If we place a small dark circular shade at the

centre of the top glass cover of an aquarium, the fish will be completely invisible from the top (Figure 4). But in reality, fish exist in the tank. This is the illusory nature of the material world. Here the interface between water and air media is the marginal potency or *Jiva-sakti*. Seen very closely, the interface of the two dissimilar media is of zero thickness. It just creates a fictitious boundary line of zero thickness between the two media – water and air. That is why it is called marginal energy or *Jiva-sakti*. In a true sense, it is non-existent as a physical element due to its zero thickness, but the imagined separation line between the two potencies is perceived by human beings as actually existing. As stated above, it can be perceived as the *Cit* (consciousness) aspect of the *Saktimat* (Supersoul). It has the same quality as *Param Brahman* but loses the identity of *Sat* (eternal) and *Ananda* (bliss) aspects of Godhead due to close association with *Maya-Sakti*, which is the air medium in this case. If we look at *Jiva-sakti* from the top of the aquarium, the side that represents *Maya-sakti* or the material world, we cannot comprehend the true nature of *Jiva-sakti*, in this case, the spirit-soul or *Atman* in a living being. Here the fish is the *Atman* in water; it is real, but it seems unreal, distorted, illusory and even inconceivable (invisible) from the outside. This is due to its association with the material world.

Now we go deeper into this marginal nature of *Jiva-sakti* with the ray trace model of the optical ray for the case of the two media as shown in Figure 5a. Let us consider the light ray coming from the left side at the interface of two media, medium 1 having a higher refractive index and medium 2 with a lighter refractive index. Due to parallax, the incident ray from medium 1 with an incident angle θ_i falls at the interface of the two media. Due to refraction, the light ray goes through an angular modulation in medium 2 with a transmission angle θ_t . The dissimilar media, however, makes some portion of the signal strength also reflect in medium 1 with an angle of reflection θ_r . By the nature of physical laws, the incident and reflected angles are the same, i.e. $\theta_i = \theta_r$. It is exactly the same as viewing adjacent vehicles with the side mirrors of a car. Here, the most significant concept is the angular modulation between the incident and refracted rays, and hence $\theta_i \neq \theta_t$. This angular modulation of the bending of the path of light is called *refraction* of light. It follows the law of refraction, and the degree of modulation depends on the ratio of the refractive indices of the two media. Suppose we increase θ_i gradually so the ray first moves away from the normal line at the plane of the interface, it can be seen that the angular spread of θ_t

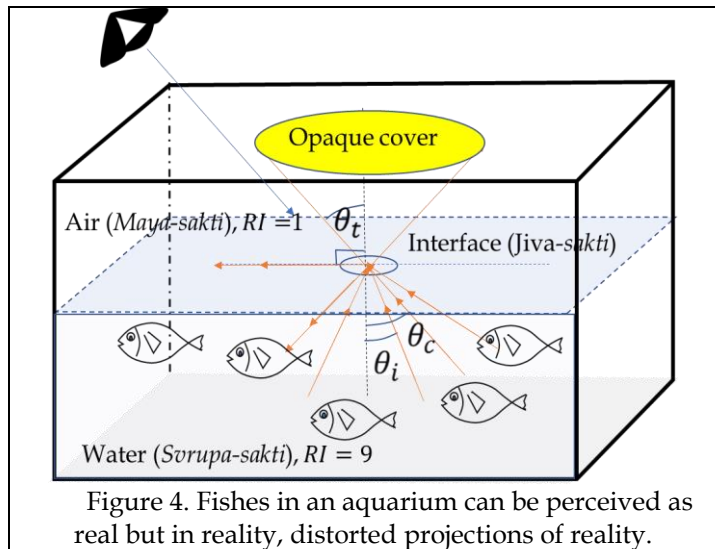


Figure 4. Fishes in an aquarium can be perceived as real but in reality, distorted projections of reality.

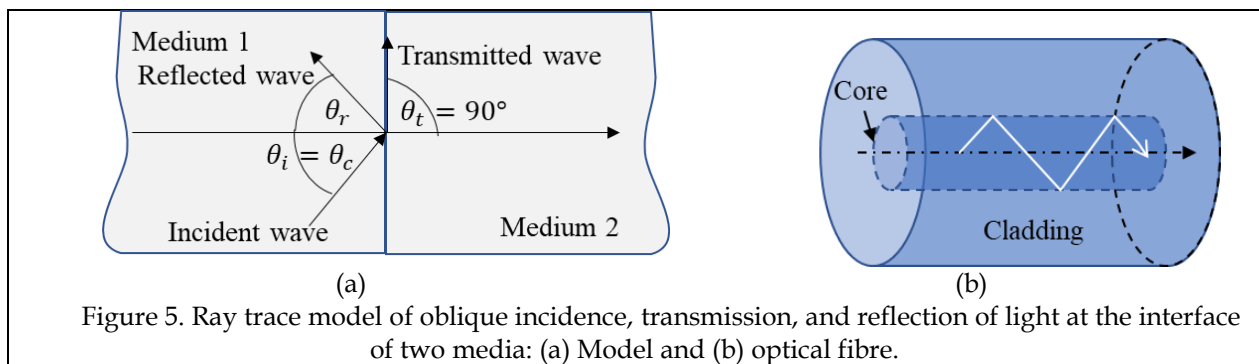
increases very fast and reaches 90°. In this condition, the signal is called *internally reflected*. What does this mean? It means that there are no communications in the second medium from the first medium.

How does the above reflect in the spiritual world? As a devotee, who is so much aligned with their body, mind, and soul toward the supreme personality of Godhead that they detach completely from the material world withdrawing their mind from worldly business. There exists just a trace (*tanmatra*) of contact with the material world for the sustenance of their gross body. A devotee has possesses a gross body (*anniyamaya kosa*) to be sustained with food, but his /her mind and five senses are fully purified with the divinity and association of other like-minded devotees, chanting, singing, hearing, and giving service to Godhead. This condition of the devotee's life is full of activities within the spiritual sphere and is equivalent to *total internal reflection*. He/She projects all their energy into the realm of the spiritual world. In concord with exactly the same principle of total internal reflection of an optical fibre working, as shown in Figure 5b, carrying many terabits of data via the light spectrum for a long distance with minimum loss of signal power.

A yogi thus channelises infinite mind power toward the divinity. Likewise, when *Yogis* sharpen their consciousness toward the Supersoul, their mind power is so purified that all potencies are projected throughout their mind and body with the effulgence of the divine ray, *brahmajoyti*. On the other hand, if one resides completely in the material world, it would be very similar to the light ray projected from medium 2 which has a low refractive index.

In the material world, our mind is polluted with desires, and sense gratification. We forget God and our true identity as *Jiva-sakti*. In this condition, no *total internal reflection* happens. We get some reflection as a distorted projection of our true self in the material world. This means more entanglement with material nature, forgetfulness of our infinite potencies and loss of our true identity - divinity. Thus, the more we live our lives with worldly desires in *Samsara*, the more we entangle ourselves with sense gratifications, too many attachments with wealth, jobs and money, position and fame, personal relations and finally, false ego. We cover ourselves with ignorance and cannot realise our true nature, although we remain in close association with the spiritual world. For example, our bodies are full of blood. A fraction of a millimetre cut on the skin can create a flow of the bloodstream. But we do not realise that, due to our highly reflective skin. Thus, the curtain of ignorance (*Maya-sakti*) becomes so thick that we forget our spiritual nature and eternal identity of *Sat-Cit-Ananda*.

How can we reverse our false identity? We develop our awareness of the fact that the distorted projections of our mind as collections of sensory experiences, memories, ego, manas, and buddhi drive us away from the path of the spiritual sky. By taking refuge from a bona fide guru who guides us towards religious and pious activities such as *Smaranam* (remembering), *Mananam* (thinking), *Srabanam* (hearing), *Sadhusanga* (association), and service attitude to the Lord. Then we can shift ourselves from the material world to the spiritual world and be free from material bondage. Only a swan can separate the substance of milk from water. A true devotee develops these qualifications to be detached from material desires and be firm in *Krishna consciousness*. As Sadhguru says through spiritual activities one can eradicate the *karmafala*, the bondage of past and present life at an accelerated pace, can attend self-realisation and ease the path to going back to Godhead (Sadhguru, 2021).



Spider as Para Brahman: Take another metaphor of a spider, as shown in Figure 6. In Vedic scriptures, a spider is placed in a very high position. The spider is one of the natural 24 gurus of Avadhuta (Chetanananda, 2023). Spiders are like *Para Brahman*; *Supersoul*. A spider brings saliva out of its body and builds a nice web. After building the web it sits at the centre with its full concentration and consciousness to the total area of its web. When an insect falls on the web, the spider reaches the entangled insect with lightning speed from the centre. Then it weaves the prey insect with its saliva to consume it later. Once his business is finished, the spider relishes its creation – the web and the victim, and then consumes the web as well. These phenomena and characteristics of the spider are like the creation (*Sristi*) of the universe, nurturing the universe (*Sthiti*), and finally, the destruction of the universe (*Pralaya*). As shown in Figure 6a, the web structure is so nicely built by the natural skills of the *Vishkarma* Spider. Drawing on the metaphor, individual circles with gradually larger radii R represent the degree of austerity and oneness with God. Here, as the difference in the intensity of the refractive indices of the two media increases, the self-internal reflective angle diminishes; the observation angle (equivalent radius of the shade) reduces, and the fish in the water tank become invisible from the top (as shown in Figure 4). This implies that a higher refractive index ratio is equivalent to one that attains liberation very quickness with little austerity. Such devotees are called *Ishwarakoti Jiva*. They are blessed from their previous births due to pious activities in their previous lives. And with very little austerity they attain Godhead. Such *Ishwarakoti Jivas* include Sri Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda and his other disciples who fall in this category.

For total internal reflection, i.e. total attachment to the Godhead, a similarly opposite intensity of detachment from the material world exists. As, with time, one walks toward one's destination, the *spiritual sky*, one creates more distance from one's previous home, the *material world*. The *Jiva* nature created by the Godhead is such that a *Jiva* can purify itself in one incarnation after another, pay off the *prarabdha karmafala* and reach Godhead quickly. This process is also advocated by Sri Krishna in BG. Figure 6b shows the front view of a spider and its antennas and limbs with the relative position concerning the three *saktis*. The antennas emerge into *Maya-sakti*, which is very similar to our sense organs collecting information from the material world and agitating our mind to engage in worldly activities. The limbs are the foundations and emerge into divinity with austerities similar to *total internal reflection*.

Ishwara's *Jiva-sakti* is inherently divine. We need to nurture the divinity within us through religious activities, an unalloyed service attitude to Godhead and association with His Devotees, *Shrabanam*, *Mananam*, *Sadhu sangha*, and *Kirtanam*. For all *Karmis*, *Bhaktas* and *Gyanis* are combined in one embodiment which is called the *devotee*, and his/her unalloyed devotional services with multifaceted attributes are called *Seva*. Each day goes on beautifully with full peace of mind as the devotee accepts any

event, easy or difficult, as the gifts of Godhead. On the final day of leaving the material body, the devotee reaches Godhead with pleasure. The bodily enjoyment, pain, and pleasure, gain and loss cannot disturb his/her tranquility and peace. Knowing all these, a devotee accepts the gifts and mercies of Sri Krishna.

Srila AC Vaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1977) makes a very beautiful statement about our spirit soul or *Jiva-sakti*. He says that *Jivas* are intrinsically spiritual, but they forget their constitutional position as part and parcel of the supreme personality of Godhead. *Jivas* are eternally conscious, blissful beings. But due to their ignorance and entanglement with the material world, they are too absorbed with material gains, losses, and sense gratifications. Still, a few distinct spiritual qualities are the reflection of *Jivas'* characteristics as divinity. The first example is that due to their *Sat* innate attribute, they do not

want to die; they want to live forever. Because by nature they are *Sat* in spirit soul. Second, they are always full of *Cit* (consciousness). Their minds, senses, ego, buddhi and self are alert around their own bodies and senses all the time. Third, a *Jiva* does not want to suffer, always wants enjoyment and to live in *Ananda*. Because their constitutional quality is bliss or *Ananda*.

In conclusion, Vaishnav philosophy is the path of unalloyed love of Krishna, a system of bhakti yoga. The great Vaishnava teacher, Sri Chaitanya's theology had been captured by His disciple in *Sri Chaitanya Lilamrita* (Tapasyananda, 2016). The path of bhakti quickly reaches emancipation. As Sri Sri Ramkrishna Parahamshadev says, in *Kali Yuga* people are too busy, running all the time after maintaining their gross bodies. Where would they have the time to practice great austerity to attain self-realisation? Therefore, in *Kali Yuga*, the best path is *Bhakti Yoga*. It reaches God very quickly without much austerity. The next section presents how an initiated or committed bhakti yogi progresses through devotional services, overcoming different stages of hurdles in spiritual development and develops *roti* (Prema) for Godhead.

Discussions

We started the essay with the definitions of Jnana, Dhyana and Bhakti Yogas. Now the question arises as to what is the fundamental difference between the three paths of knowledge, way of meditation and devotion? The main goal is the same: everyone wants to know *Para Brahman* and to reach Him. As Sri Krishna says in BG attaining Him is the absolute goal. A *Gyani*, the knowledge seeker, with his/her tools of intelligence and discrimination, negates one by one all elements of the phenomenal world. Sri Krishna says, "I am not the body nor mind, nor part of the phenomenal world". After all the negations and discriminations we are left with formless, attributeless and acosmic divinity – the absolute. A *Dhyana Yogi* follows *astanga sadhana* and wants to reach God, e.g. Dhruv Maharaja. He went to the forest after being

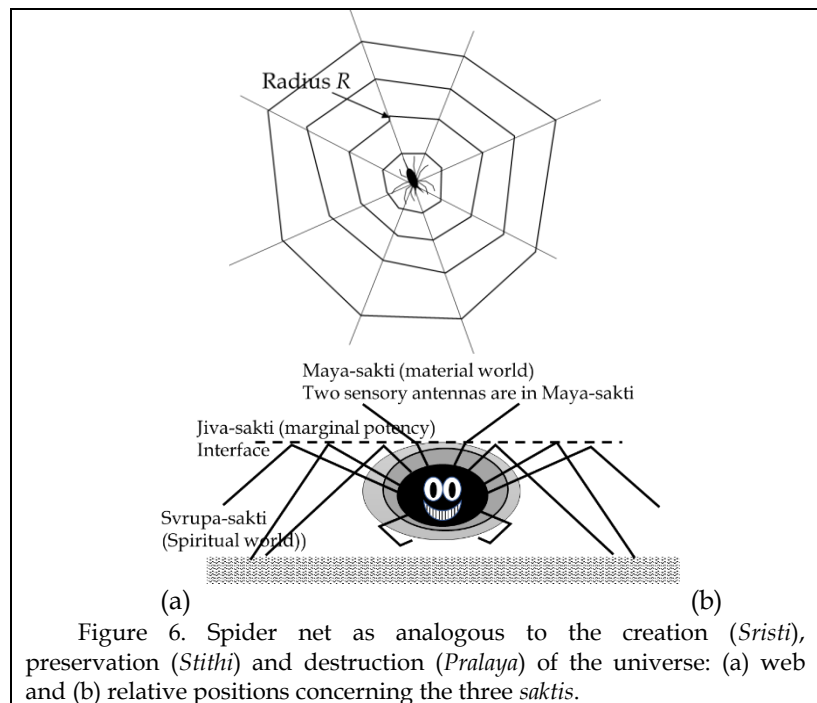


Figure 6. Spider net as analogous to the creation (*Sristi*), preservation (*Stithi*) and destruction (*Pralaya*) of the universe: (a) web and (b) relative positions concerning the three *saktis*.

insulted by his stepmother and to take revenge for the insult, he wanted to become the heir to his father's throne, and he practiced austerity. Finally, he attained four-armed Narayana as his Bhagavan. Then he realised how foolish he was. Instead of asking for God's association and unalloyed love for Him, he wanted to be a mere king. The pure devotee does not want any of the above. He/She does not want *moksha* (liberation) nor oneness with God as the Gyana Yogi does. Neither do they worship God for material gain as Dhruva Maharaja and Hiranyakashipu did. The devotee only wants to perform devotional service to God with unalloyed love to please Him. The devotee always wants to remember God and wants to exchange praiseworthy conversations and dialogues with other devotees to glorify and satisfy Krishna. The devotee wants to serve Krishna even after he/she dies in His eternal abode. He/She only desires that not only in this birth but over the next thousand incarnations, assurance so that they can only serve Krishna with unalloyed devotion. Thus, they obtain pure love for Krishna through devotional services. This urge automatically also purifies their senses and mind. They live a very simple personal life with minimum sustenance and uphold their high ideal aligned with Krishna.

Bhakti Yoga

Pure devotees do not want God to appear in front of them and give them a boon. They want God as their friend, like Arjuna had. He asked only for the association and shelter of Krishna, leaving aside the temptation of getting one thousand Narayani soldiers who were very brave fighters. Pure devotees have only the desire how to serve Krishna. They want to serve Krishna as their friend, or child, or conjugal lover. The devotee does not want formless God, but a personal God to whom they can express their unalloyed love for Him, from the core of their heart and soul. They want to build a transcendental (*Chinmoy*) deity as the highest ideal in their heart, the location of their loving temple of God.

To realise the soul within and understand that one is not gross body nor subtle mind, but one is the eternal soul, part and parcel of the supreme personality of Godhead, we need, first and foremost, a calm and purified mind aligned with God. We also need the intrinsic spiritual inclination that keeps the mind situated on a platform of high ideals, all the time. How can we do this? Through continuous remembrance, chanting, listening, and associating with like-minded devotees. We also need to keep our health sound so that we can perform those services for the loving God uninterrupted. It is not possible to attain God without these two imperative resources, a sound body and mind complex. The reason is that the *sat-cit-ananda bigraha* is the soul, which is the same as Supersoul in quality, but different in the entity. The spirit soul is *Sat* meaning eternal and deathless, *and Cit* meaning full of consciousness, the entity that has the power to think, contemplate and make decisions based on discriminatory power with intellect (*buddhi*). Every living being has active consciousness around his/her body-mind complex. In the absence of consciousness, the living being is declared a dead entity. Finally, the *Ananda* attribute. *Ananda* means *sambhoga*, the desire for enjoyment and bliss. We, the living entities, want to love, be loved, live in peace, and enjoy *Ananda*. We want, by all means, to reject and negate sorrows and miseries. These are the inherent and intrinsic attributes of the Spirit Soul.

Process of Bhakti

The question is, "What is the process of realising that we are spirit soul and of similar quality to the Supersoul?" The process of learning the answer is called *Vaidhi* or *Sadhana Bhakti*. It is the disciplined process of shaping our minds and developing our inclination toward the higher ideal. If we can control our unruly minds with austerity, and regular practice of the religious rituals under the guidance of a bona fide Guru who himself/herself is a realised soul, then we can achieve the power to control our senses, the windows of our mind. Thus, keeping our mind calm and cool, we can enquire about the meaning of our lives, and why we are here. After death where will we go to live the next life? Who is the controller of the

universe? Who is also controlling our minds and senses? If we understand that the world is a temporary place and a place to uplift our spiritual position in every incarnation, then the continuous enquiries about our selves cleanse our mind, *chetana*, and purify our *buddhi*, sharpen our *intellect*, and the inner self becomes luminous. Then we understand that we are not gross body, not subtle mind, but we are the eternal spirit soul, lit with *Brhmajyoti* and linked intrinsically with the Supersoul. A child naturally becomes the heir to his parental properties. Likewise, liberation is automatic via the *Krishna consciousness*. This consciousness of being with Krishna is called *bhakti*.

In any circumstance, remembering Krishna is *Krishna consciousness*. For difficult situations, I believe in Krishna's mercy; assume that Krishna appears in this form in front of me. Therefore, I need to live in this situation without any grievance. This conviction should be with full devotion of body, mind, and soul. Total conviction, total surrender to Krishna! This is the path. Gopis wanted to experience Krishna's mercy. How? They wanted Sri Krishna rescues them from the captivity of demons and relished their desires in that form of Krishna. Likewise, each devotee has the mindset that any situation they are put in is Krishna's mercy and they want to experience this situation as the association of Krishna and a gift from Him. Therefore, do not lose Krishna. Since all is Krishna, never turn your back to Krishna. Ask yourself in any situation, do I ask for Krishna's mercy? A pure devotee always gets a 'yes' answer to this intuitive question. Krishna's mercy automatically falls on a devotee if he develops such *Krishna consciousness*. The blessing of Kali Yuga is that taking shelter in the Lord's holy name is the cure for all material diseases. Just sit peacefully and chant. Achieve Krishna's association in this form.

Comprehend that Krishna is mercifully doing this for me. Hold tightly to this ideal and stay on the path of bhakti with full dedication. This is the real *Krishna Consciousness* and a very good analogy for the total internal reflection as explained in the theory of oblique incidence of optics.

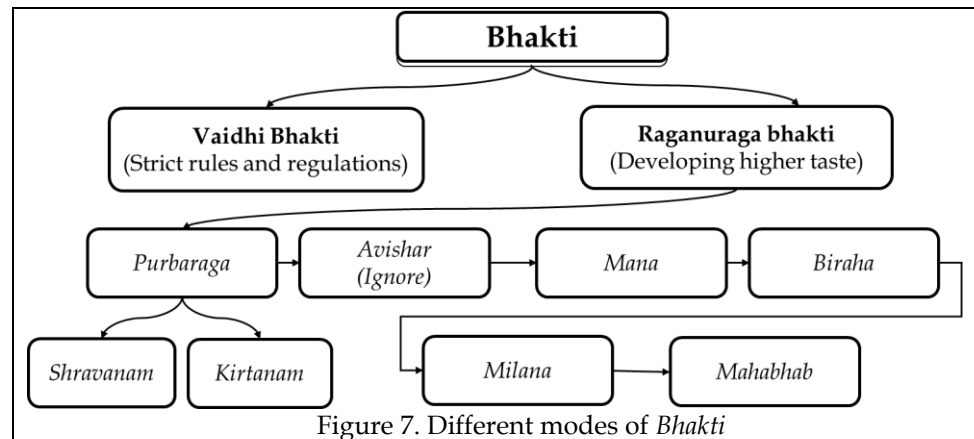


Figure 7. Different modes of *Bhakti*

Following this course of devotional service, *Vaidhi bhakti* climbs to the higher taste of Krishna which is called *Raganuraga bhakti*. As shown in Figure 7, *Raganuraga bhakti* has different stages of achievement: *Purba raga*, such as liking hearing about Krishna, as well as chanting and Kirtana of Krishna's name and fame. Then *avishar*, like devotee wants to ignore his beloved high ideal, and hides from Him, then *maan*, *birah*, and finally *milan*, assimilation with God as His subordinate or devotee. The intensities of different higher stages must be understood like a bona fide lover's urges for his/her beloved one. Not the way a Gyana Yogi desires to be one with the supreme absolute – *nirguna Brahman*.

There are different elements of Bhakti Yoga. Sri Krishna in BG Chapter 12: Bhakti Yoga, from Sloka 10-20, explains in detail what to do to achieve *Raganuraga bhakti* (Saradananda, 1995). Following the path of devotion, one first purifies his/her soul as an automatic process (Satprakashananda, 1995). Full surrender to the supreme personality of Godhead is the first and foremost ideal to achieve *bhakti*. Since a *bhakta* has unconditional and unalloyed love for Krishna, he loves everyone equally. He does not judge

the gain and loss of his activities in the material world because what he does is only for Krishna (BG 12:10-20) The advantage of this Kali Yuga is that only taking shelter in the Lord's holy name and lotus feet gives salvation. Just sit peacefully and chant His holy name. A few basic steps to reach the ultimate goal are as follows:

1. Be sincere to Krishna as the supreme personality of Godhead.
2. In any circumstance, remembering Him is the '*Krishna consciousness*'.
3. For difficult situations, believe in Krishna's mercy; assume that Krishna mercifully appears in this form in front of me. This conviction should be with full devotion and love of Krishna with your body, mind, and soul. This means it is the total conviction and total surrender to the lotus feet of Lord Krishna.
4. Remember Krishna's unlimited potencies, mercy, benediction, love, and effulgence all the time. Be such that you feel secure with those unlimited potencies and wealth in your heart.
5. Remember that Krishna consciousness is the symptom of *Bhakti*. If you see '*what is happening to you*' is Krishna, then you have full love of Krishna.
6. Do not lose Krishna for a single moment.
7. Realise that what you see, and experience with the five senses and mind, are all Krishna. Never turn your back to Krishna.
8. Always ask for His mercy and remember that He is always with you. Develop this kind of accompaniment and love of Krishna all the time. The Lord's mercy automatically falls on you if you develop such a relationship through Krishna consciousness.
9. Remember in this iron age of Kali Yuga, one of the biggest advantages is Bhakti Yoga. Just take shelter in the Lord's holy name, sit peacefully, and chant his holy name. This is the easiest path of liberation in this age.
10. Always remember that Krishna accompanies me like this. Krishan is doing this by me like this. All are His work. I am the instrument, and He is the master of the instrument. Hold tightly to Krishna and stay on the path without any tolerance of deviation.

Study Originality and Implication

The work systematically analysed the main Vedic Scriptures and presented the three potencies of the supreme personality of the Godhead. A comparative analysis of Sankaracharya's non-dualism and Vaishnava philosophy's dualism with personalised Godhead has been performed and summarised in Table 1. In metaphors, experiments, and findings, the three potencies are examined based on the theory of ray trace model of optics at the interface of two media. *Jiva-sakti* lies in between the two potencies as the boundary line. The theory of *total internal reflection* explains the full inclination of the *Jiva-sakti* either toward the *Svarupa-sakti* or *Maya-sakti*. As an extension of the concept of *total internal reflection*, a spider web and spider anatomy have been analysed to reflect the permeability of *Jiva-sakti* at the boundary line and its easy passage between the two potencies of the supreme personality of Godhead. This phenomenon reflects the free will of *Jivas*. Finally, different paths of realisation of God have been analysed and Bhakti Yoga as the preferred path of Kali Yuga has been described.

Limitations

There are a few caveats. A detailed explanation of the scientific theories of optics is not possible for presenting, due to the limitation of page counts of the manuscript. BG *Bhakti Yoga* slokas and SB slokas are only cited here, again due to limitation of pages. Scriptures of other faiths (eg. the Bible, the Tora, the Quran, the Tripitaka) are not used because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of those texts. Finally, this writing has been prepared with limited knowledge of the vast treasure of Vedic scriptures.

Therefore, any errors and/or omissions in citations and appropriate insights are inadvertent. While proper citations of resources used are cited in the text, some inadvertent omissions may occur. The supreme personality of the Godhead is expressed in various words: Brahman, Para Brahman, Sir Krishna, God etc. They mean the same Godhead. Krishan is a secular Godhead and does not belong to any belief system. He is the universal Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Conclusions

Different cultural and religious beliefs have their interpretations of the concept of Godhead's three potencies: *Cit-sakti*, *Jiva sakti* and *Maya-sakti*. *Jiva-sakti* is perceived as part and parcel of God's *Cit-sakti* and is the same in quality. *Maya-sakti* is the ever-changing phenomenal world, hence does not exist in Sankaracharya's non-duality aspects. These have been debated for centuries. This work emphasises the relative position of *Jiva-sakti* concerning the two other potencies of Godhead. As Vedic literatures advocate two existence of God - *Prana* (vitality or energy) and *Akasha* (material existence). In its simple terms, *Jiva-sakti* is the energy of God that gives existence its vitality. It is frequently associated with spiritual enlightenment and heightened awareness, but its precise nature remains a mystery to many. In Hinduism, *Jiva-sakti* is typically referred to as *prana* or *shakti*. Hindus consider all living beings to be composed of five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether (space). There is nothing comparable to *prana* or *shakti* in some atheistic branches of Hinduism. Although some Buddhist philosophies recognise an enlightened mind or spirit that governs our actions by Buddhist teachings.

This work has investigated a scientific and a cultural metaphor to understand the relative position of *Jiva-sakti* concerning the two other potencies of God. From a scientific standpoint, there has been considerable debate over whether *Jiva-sakti* exists beyond philosophical realms. In recent times, many branches of science have been researching awareness. Hence the perception of *Jiva-sakti* has been changing. People have started to accept concepts of energies that exist beyond human perceptions. This article has tried to throw some light on some enigmatic concepts of *Jiva-sakti*, using the theory of oblique incidence of optics. With these metaphors and the theory of *total internal reflection* at the interface of two media, the author is developing a new understanding of *Jiva-sakti* and its closeness to *Cit-sakti*. This work provides some greater clarity using the analysis of *total internal reflection*, supported by an extensive literature review. The methodological aspects used in the paper are deliberate and balanced so that a non-technical person can understand the concept of *Jiva-sakti* and its realms in the spiritual skies. The findings of the work are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of hypotheses presented in the work.

Themes	Analogy	Remarks
God's total potencies	Ray trace model of Spider with web; fishes in water	All three potencies combined as the universe
Maya-sakti	Air above the water-air interface	Perceived world; phenomenal world
Jiva-sakti	Fish in water, interface of air-water	Living entities; marginal potency of God
Svarupa-sakti; Cit-sakti	Water	Formless, attributeless, acosmic
Bhakti yoga	Total internal reflection	Fully absorbed in the spiritual realm of Godhead

From the above discussions on *Bhakti Yoga*, we make the following concluding remarks:

1. The potency of Brahman is limitless. He is single and complete, always universal, and infinite.

2. There are three forms of His Sakti or potencies: Spiritual, material and living entities. The first one is *Svarupa-skati*, which is inconceivable in nature. His *Maya-sakti* appears as the material world. In between these two Saktis, *Jiva-sakti* exists just like an interface with no physical existence, but with spiritual potencies the same in quality as Brahman; but minute in quantities.
3. To understand the physically illusory *Jiva-sakti*, a metaphor of the oblique incidence of optical rays is examined. The *total internal reflection* in the same optically denser media represents the *Krishna consciousness*. When a living entity becomes absorbed with the thoughts and remembrance of Krishna, he/she becomes naturally detached from the gross material affinity and sets himself/herself free from the entanglement of the worldly miseries of birth, death, old age, and disease.
4. In this iron age of Kali Yuga, full surrender to Krishna is the recommended lovely path to liberation. Sri Krishna explains how a *Bhakta* achieves Him through the path of renunciations, austerity, and loving services.
5. The Vaishnav bhakti philosophy accepts the oneness of the supreme personality of the Godhead. The non-dual nature of *Para Brahman* is preserved with its ontological and morphological concepts of three saktis, but at the same time, this accepts His other two potencies like His *Maya-skati* and *Jiva-sakti* as real. (Maharaj, 1994).
6. *Jiva-Sakti* exists, this is the reality. *Jivas* and *Maya-sakti* are all from the Godhead. No confusion arises if we accept Vedic scriptures such as Upanishads and BG with specific references to Isha Upanishad 2:5 and BG15:7.
7. Finally, the limitations and conclusions of the paper are expressed, with a recommendation of full surrender to Krishna as the easiest path of liberation in the iron age of *Kali Yuga*.

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